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SCANDINAVIAN INVASION

THE OVERWHELMING success of the Hives has had a dam-bursting effect on the music scene of their country and its nearest neighbours. Once the pop-song capital of the world, Sweden is now the garage-punk hot spot with Norway yapping at its heels.

DIVISION OF LAURA LEE

Together since 1997, guitarist David Ojala, drummer Håkan Johansson, bassist/vocalist Jonas Gustavsson and guitarist/vocalist Per Stålberg have just issued one of the albums of the year, *Black City*. Though they punch out the aggro-fun punk like their compatriots, a shoegazing and new-wave depth (think My Bloody Valentine, early Primal Scream, Jesus And Mary Chain) sets them apart from the crowd. A menacingly focused set of *Black City*, driven by an At The Drive-In level of intensity, *Black City* is the band's Burning Heart debut and a worthy recipient of the hype.

THE (INTERNATIONAL) NOISE CONSPIRACY

Formed by ex-Refused singer Dennis Lyxzén a year on from DOLL's own coming together, the (International) Noise Conspiracy have risen above cult status on the wave of new rock. The quintet's passion for "dirty '60s punk rock, soul, and radical politics", which inspired a 15-date illegal underground tour of China in 1999, simmers across their three albums. The most recent, *A New Morning, Changing Weather*, was one of last year's stars, seething with their outspoken anti-corporate rhetoric, subversive wordplay and bristling guitar-noise punk & roll. Another Burning Heart act, they'll launch their next aural assault at Livid.

THE CATO SALSA EXPERIENCE

A little lighter in motifs and heavier on the '60s psychedelic pop vibe, "the most happening band in Norway" (*NME*) is all fun, technicoloured garage rock. With newly release debut *A Good Tip For A Good Time* pumping out Cato Thomassen's big riffs and electric vocals, Nina Bjørndalen's Hammond organ combined with the frenetic, action-packed bass and drum work of Christian Engfelt and Jon Magne Riise, CSE take Jon Spencer on a trip down Abbey Road.



THE (INTERNATIONAL) NOISE CONSPIRACY

>> Unlike movements before it, this new wave of garage-rock bands is small and mobile; the groups don't require massive production to whip up a storm in a club – the opposite, in fact. The groups have built a grassroots following through hitting the live circuit and hitting it often. Although their albums aren't shifting huge numbers (the Strokes have sold less than two million copies of *Is This It* and the Vines have shifted just over 500,000 copies of *Highly*

formulaic; the live performances were just rote spectacles with all the soul of a Jerry Bruckheimer film. The Vines, the Strokes, the White Stripes and their new-rock classmates, retain a sense of live, unpredictable energy that won't, and can't be harnessed. Unlike the overblown nu-metal scene, less is far more: the Vines' two hit singles add up to less than five minutes of purely inspiring music.

Craig Nicholls: "Before music, there wasn't much in the world for me to do. It gave me a reason to go outdoors."

Evolved, worldwide) there's a sense of excitement building again.

There's no doubt that new rock has opened up record company cheque-books, eager to capture the Next Big Thing. As one label managing director recently remarked, "One of these bands is going to make a *Nevermind*."

A frontrunner for this is the Vines. The band from Oatley, south of Sydney, has caused a massive international stir – and it's not just with high international chart placings. On a good night the Vines can be incandescent, transcendental. On a bad night they are woeful. Sometimes they can be both at the same time. Take the group's August 19 performance on David Letterman's *Late Show*: the group descended into Stooges-style sludge and singer Craig Nicholls injured himself on the mike stand, completing a blistering version of "Get Free" with blood all over his face. "Troubled teens!" Letterman quipped with a bemused grin as he threw to the commercial break.

This succinctly summed up the appeal of the Vines and their peers. They are still unpredictable; Nicholls is still ruled by his whims. For at least the past 10 years, rock music has been presided over by careerists. Last year's outlaw, Limp Bizkit's Fred Durst went from a tattoo parlour to a vice presidency of a multinational company; the records he made on the way through were largely incidental. It showed. Everything was branded and

Then there's chemical X, charisma. Craig Nicholls clearly has it: he's young, good looking, tousled and troubled. He has a reputation for consuming excessive amounts of marijuana and for being vague and enigmatic. The *NME* famously announced that its readers should see the Vines this year – before Nicholls became the next Cobain. Let's face it, if the Vines' material didn't stand up, their frontman would be tagged as a prize wanker. Like many, Andy Slater, who sealed up the American deal for the band, was floored when he met Nicholls.

"I was at the studio with another new band on the label and this kid walked in, and he had this immediate presence. He wasn't looking at anything in particular – just wandering around the studio, kind of looking at the air," Slater recalls. "Sometimes artists are tapped in to some other dimension that enables them to articulate things we want to say but sometimes can't. He felt like someone who was tapped in."

On September 19, 2000, as the sun set over the CBD and its workers filed through Belmore Park in Sydney, the Vines performed first on the bill for free Olympic shows. Oddly matched with Golden Rough and Hoolahan, the Vines' thunderous, noisy, sprawling rock show unfolding on the high stage was a little incongruous with the neat astro-turf scattered with curious onlookers and oblivious passers-by. Nicholls, whose waifish build was accentuated by his



closely cropped Sid Vicious do, had the chaotic grace and shambolic style of a rock star waiting to happen – even if their sound, and songs, were in need of plenty of polish.

“They were incredibly scrappy and totally obsessed with the music,” remembers Andy Kelly, the band’s Sydney-based co-manager, of his first time with the Vines. “Within 30 seconds, I turned to Andy [Cassell, management partner] and said, ‘Do you see the same thing I see?’ Craig was just lost in his world onstage, playing this amazing music. We couldn’t believe this person that no-one knew anything about could have so much talent and charisma.”

The legend of the Vines is already very familiar: flipping burgers in McDonald’s, obsessing about Nirvana, Nicholls spending his formative years pulling bongs to daytime television. Clearly there’s some truth to the image of the singer as a reclusive, shy and spaced twentysomething, yet despite the angsty edge to his music Nicholls doesn’t appear to be dangerous – to himself or anyone else. Intense, but not especially self-destructive, his background of a stable, loving family doesn’t lend itself to the dysfunctional anthems that erupted out of Seattle a decade ago. This makes up a lot of the appeal of the movement: music fans have had enough psychobabble, we want rock & roll to be fun again.

Just an enigma out front wouldn’t be enough, though. The difference between the Vines and a hyped-up, highly exposed rock machine like Andrew WK lies in the Beatles-esque quality of the songs crafted on *Highly Evolved*. Classicism as well as charisma.

“I was floored,” remarks Slater. “It had all the energy and spirit of rock & roll rebellion, yet all the melodic sense that a gifted singer-songwriter would bring to a record. For a while now, you get a feeling listening to the radio that we are coming to the end of one era in rock and the beginning of another one. No-one knows just what shape the new one would take, but this music sounded like what should be on the radio.”

“Craig was very protective of his turf,” reveals Rob Schnapf, producer of *Highly Evolved*. “I worked hard at trying to show him that I was there to help, that I cared as much about his music as he did. He’s totally obsessed by the music. People talk a lot about how he seems to lose himself in the music onstage – it’s no act. I’d be at the console watching him just going out of his mind some days, bouncing off the walls. He was so intense about what he was doing.”

>>

THE SECOND WAVE

Thanks to the Strokes, the focus is once again on New York City, one of the breeding grounds for garage punk. But a few new faces of this rock renaissance are shifting the spotlight across the US: Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, the Pattern and Vue are building San Francisco’s profile; the Von Bondies are showing that there’s more to Detroit Rock City than Jack and Meg and MC5.

THE VON BONDIES

Given the dream support of a White Stripes tour and a debut produced by Jack and Meg, the Von Bondies are outdoing their fellow Detroit rockers. The charismatic energy oozing from Jon Spencer-esque hollering frontman Jason Stollsteimer, guitarist Marcie Bolen, bassist Carrie Smith and drummer Don Blum saw *The Guardian* gush, “[They] have one advantage over their retro-coll compatriots. They know that sex sells.” Debut *Lack Of Communication* captures this sexy, unbridled, feedback-driven, raw rock & roll, which wooed the *NME* at Reading: “Bands who get a leg up from their more famous friends... are rarely this awesome.”

THE PATTERN

This two-year-old five-piece hail from Oakland, near San Francisco, infamous for crime, drugs and poverty. As such, their dirty garage rock sidesteps the glamour for raw, soulful guitar punk with a nod to Beatles harmonies. Big In England (“In a world of blind promises and bland self-assurance, the Pattern are a free-wheeling, rainbow-coloured rock & roll dream come true” – *NME*) the excellent, tight debut *Real Feelness* offers the carefree fun of the Hives with Strokes style and looks.

VUE

This San Francisco quintet exude a primal, dark and sexy sound that name-checks seminal rock & roll outfits – as well as NYC post-punk, ’70s soul and British rock – but twists it to their own sound. Rex Shelverton, guitarist Jonah Buffa, bassist Jeremy Bringetto, keyboardist Jessica Ann Graves and drummer Rafael Orlin maintain a punk DIY ethic in their warts-and-all straight-to-tape recording style; their second LP *Find Your Home* simmers with moody keys, deep rhythms and noisy amped-up rock sprawl. With fellow San Fran act Black Rebel Motorcycle Club’s ascent, there’s more to the American garage-rock movement than NYC.

THE HIVES

THE MEN WHO (MOSTLY)
MAKE WHITE PANTS COOL



>> "I'm just passionate about what we do," says Nicholls. "People often think I'm freaking out when we're playing, but there's a joy in turning yourself over to the music and letting it lift you. It's almost a sacred thing to us."

"There's an intensity to our music that may sound like negativity sometimes, but mostly I see the music as optimistic," he continues. "I'm certainly an optimistic person; I don't see any point in being alive if you're not. Music helps you feel that way. It has certainly lifted me. Before music, there wasn't much in the world for me to do. It gave me a reason to go outdoors."

Like the '70s punk revolution, new rock is simultaneously global and intensely local. Scenes have suddenly become visible all over the planet – whether it's the White Stripes' rock-city neighbourhood of Detroit or the distant land of the long white cloud, New Zealand. There has been an especially strong resurgence of fresh sounds emerging from New York City for the first time in 20 years since the heady days of CBGB's or the early days of rap in Brooklyn and the Bronx.

The Big Apple's favourite sons, the Strokes have led the new rock charge. However, there are plenty of new bands ready to carry the baton.

"It's more like, 'I was driving down the street and saw someone walking by and, fuck, let's play E chords, yeah!'"

More telling is his view about the Beatles and the music of that era, and the overwhelming sense of importance. "There was something very artistic, worthwhile about what I heard in those records," he explains. "It felt real, like someone expressing his life passion, not just making music to get on the radio."

Now that the Vines have hit the airwaves themselves, Nicholls is under intense pressure. All spotlights are facing his way, and the music media are calling for action. They want a rock star that will behave like one is expected to – even if it means treading the rocky terrain of Jim Morrison or Kurt Cobain. The band's management is well aware of the psychological cost this entails.

"I don't think he's trying to project an image," Kelly says. "On the contrary, he often finds it difficult to understand why people are interested in him or why people, especially in England, are trying to make him into something he's not. The only thing he's interested in is writing and recording music. Back home he pretty much stayed in his room and worked on his music; that was his whole life. Our job at the moment is to take a bit of the heat off the band and go home. They need to go home and be normal."

"People are looking for the next Strokes," says the Yeah Yeah Yeahs' guitarist Nick Zinner. "We're not it." Maybe so, but the three-piece act fronted by Karen O are causing a stir. Their sound has its roots in punk, but their thrash is leavened by a sense of humour and abandon rarely found in the post-Blink 182 punk scene. The group's five-track *Master EP*, rock with a quirkiness, is one of the more delightful records of recent years.

"What's happening now reminds me of what happened in New York from 1979 to 1982 or so," the guitarist adds. "People are taking chances across the board, and as a result, a lot of the bands people are talking about really are high calibre."

Another New York favourite is the Liars, who have issued the brilliantly titled *They Threw Us In A Trench And Stuck A Monument On Top*. Singer Angus Andrew, originally from Melbourne, met guitarist Aaron Hemphill in Los Angeles. After moving to New York they found bassist Pat Noecker and drummer Ron Albertson. The group's sound clearly owes some debt to punk rock, but it's more into the playful technology of the post-punk bands such as Gang Of Four and the Slits with a heavy dose of the Birthday Party's

theatrics. Their sell-out shows around Manhattan are largely due to the flailing charismatic Andrew and the relentless percussive noise of the band. The debut album, which has garnered great reviews since its release late last year, was recorded in just two days. Compare and contrast with Silverchair's 2002 epic, *Diorama*.

The Liars' Melbourne connection is in line with a surprising trend: many of the 2002 new-rock contenders stem from the Southern Hemisphere. The hottest charge is coming from the Datsuns who have been playing their garage rock for the past six years since forming in Cambridge on New Zealand's North Island.

"It's just funny how fashion changes people's opinions of things," says singing bassist Dolf De Datsun. "Before, we were stupid; now, we're genius. Six months ago people were telling us to give it up. And now look at us.

"Music seems to work in cycles," he adds. "It's all about moments. I think if you're good at what you do, you love it and you keep doing it, then eventually that moment will come around. We're all very conscious of that 'fashionable' thing and we know that eventually we are going to be out-of-fashion again. Easy come, easy go; we accept that. You've just got to be yourself and remember there have always been pockets of people making this kind of music."

Their furious live performances have earned them gushing praise from NME ("We're besotted," claims the paper). Also raising plaudits in the weekly UK music bible is another Kiwi band, the D4 from Auckland's northern suburbs. Together since 1998, their classic garage-punk stylings have caused a British storm. NME offered them Single of the Week, *Kerrang!* deemed them "brutal garage punk", and their UK label Infectious is hoping to break them big.

"We do have our own style but we don't see what we are doing as particularly original or groundbreaking," admits the band's singer/guitarist Dion. "But we enjoy it. We just want to play rock & roll music."

"I think that's probably something we're conscious of not doing," adds singer/guitarist Jimmy. "The songs are about day-to-day things or frustrations or the way we're feeling, there's no preaching the state of the world. It's more like, 'I was driving down the street and saw someone walking by and, fuck, let's play E chords, yeah!'"

This groundswell in regional scenes reflects the DIY mentality of the new rockers. Through relegation to the outer rims of style circles, these bands have cultivated a healthy sense of disregard for fleeting fashions. The D4 built their strong local reputation with two years of solid small live shows. Overwhelmingly though, the movement touches base with the Beatles and with '60s rock and pop in general. The new rock shares an awareness of the old rock. It's nostalgia for a simpler time, and a return base values.

"A lot of these songs are just exhilarating, maybe because of their brevity," explains Miami Steve Van Zandt, guitarist for Bruce Springsteen's, star of *The Sopranos* and host of a syndicated radio show that specialises in past garage rock - Seeds, the Shadows of Knight, the Standells - and the new faces like Mooney Suzuki.

"There was a certain excitement that had been and gone, there's no question about it. The choices we have been left with in the mainstream are heavy metal, rap and pop," he says. "There's nothing wrong with that. But the lack of choices, the lack of opportunity for the young generation to be turned on to all these other cool things, that needs to be corrected. That's just not right."

And there's no sign of the swell dropping off. Melbourne's organ-driven four-piece Rocket Science have been coaxed out on the road in the UK with recent Australian tour buddies and new fans, Supergrass; the D4 will spend the remainder of the year in Europe. New groups from the US are filtering through, like the Jack White-produced Von Bondies of Detroit, Oakland California's the Pattern and Washington DC's Pretty Girls Make Graves (ex-Murder City Devils) - three Reading 2002 stars - plus Vue from San Francisco. As one reviewer from Reading highlights, the view from the top of the garage-rock mountain is still looking pretty damn good:

[The White Stripes] are fantastic. Bashing her drums like an over-charged Duracell monkey, Meg somehow still manages to appear an ice-queen, coolly detached yet totally involved. In the meantime, Jack gets on with proving his guitar prowess centre-stage whilst revving his Led Zep-like vocals up to full throttle, his Jagger-esque pronunciation of lyrics like "sa-tis-fac-shun" ensuring the Stripes a place in the rock & roll hall of fame. Certainly their triumphant set at Reading 2002 will go down in history - if only for succeeding in making Dolly Parton's "Jolene" one of the coolest songs you've ever heard.

- Abi Rowland, reviewer, Reading Festival 2002 ①

OLD SCHOOL



Various Artists - *Nuggets*.

Compiled by critic and Patti Smith guitarist Lenny Kaye in 1972, this collection of garage-rock one-hit wonders is a complete treasure trove of fuzz boxes and Farfisa organs. It's the ultimate garage-rock mother lode and an essential purchase.

The Stooges - *Funhouse*.

Iggy Pop's Detroit combo in the studio with John Cale transformed insane blues rock and three chords into an artistic masterpiece. Further out than free jazz but with a gut level, 'tang-chasing stupidity these masterpieces were the precursors to punk and everything after.



Various Artists - *Ugly Things*.

Raven Records' tribute to Australian garage rock of the '60s is rawer than the American model but just as out there.

The Missing Links -

The Missing Links.

Australia's greatest garage band made one album before disappearing but it's as hairy, as joyful and as guitar-wailing as anything produced at the time. Recently reissued by Half A Cow, this album is a must have.



The Sonics - *Boom*.

Out of Seattle before Cobain was born, the Sonics were the toughest rocking garage band of the '60s (although most of their records are now impossibly rare). Dirty guitars, dirty singing, tough but tender.



Television - *Marquee Moon*, *The Blow Up*.

Possibly New York's finest ever group. Although complex and self-consciously arty, Television came from a garage-rock sensibility (note their cover of the 13th Floor Elevators' "Fire Engine"). Their brittle, ironic sound was very much in the tradition.



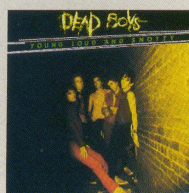
The Velvet Underground - *The Velvet Underground & Nico*.

John Cale may have been classically trained but the Velvets never got out of the garage with their thin sound and psychedelic workouts. Experimentation without the tools to make it work is a hallmark of a great garage-rock band.



The Dead Boys - *Young, Loud & Snotty*.

Originally from Ohio, the clowns of CBGB's produced a couple off classic tracks, especially "Sonic Reducer" which just burnt off the needle.



New York Dolls - *New York Dolls, Too Much Too Soon*.

Junkies, glamour pussies. The Dolls epitomised the ironic and devil-may-care approach of garage bands. Flash was everything; having fun was everything else. They remade R&B standards by pulling them apart.



The Hoodoo Gurus - *Stoneage Romeos*.

That's cool! That's trash! With an encyclopedic knowledge of '60s garage pop, the Hoodoo Gurus took it to another level that was affectionate and ironic. The riffs are bigger and the drums from James Baker are massive. Not so much angst but a great time.

